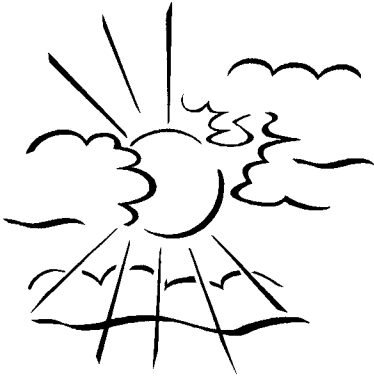


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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, April 10, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Letters to the Editor

Lansing State Journal

April 10, 2006

Case is 'fiasco'

I am a regular reader of the LSJ, and have been following the so-called "pre-trial" fiasco of the murder case against the so-called "parents" of Ricky Holland. His parents are making a joke out of our court system.

The main part of any trial is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Then I read further that the pre-hearing will determine whether there is enough evidence to go to trial. Give me a break!

We could better use the money wasted on this case to shore up our crumbling school system, rather than defend these two. Little Ricky is dead, beyond a reasonable doubt.

Little Ricky, rest in peace, for you are now in a better place where you will receive no more pain, only gain.

Dick Tuitman
Portland

Family finds newborn on porch

Hours-old baby is in guarded condition in hospital after being left outside Brownstown home in near-freezing temperatures.

Paul Egan / The Detroit News
April 9, 2006

BROWNSTOWN TOWNSHIP -- Police are looking for a mother who abandoned her newborn on a family's front porch in near-freezing temperatures early Saturday morning.

The blond-haired girl, who was wrapped in a blue towel and a purple hand-crocheted blanket, still had her umbilical cord attached and was 6 to 8 hours old, said Detective Paul Lazar of the Brownstown Police Department.

The baby is in guarded condition at Children's Hospital, where doctors are watching for signs of infection, he said.

Rafal Rozner and his wife, Karolina, discovered the baby as they were pulling out of their driveway at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in Brownstown Township's Fox Creek subdivision, shortly after 8 a.m. Saturday.

"Everything was a miracle," said Rafal Rozner, who left his home through a side door to an attached garage but heard a baby crying and noticed the tiny bundle on his porch.

Rafal Rozner, a 28-year-old truck driver, said he and his wife usually stay home Saturday morning but left early because they had a 9 a.m. appointment at a veterinarian to get shots for their dogs.

"I walked to the blanket, and I saw a baby's little hands, asking for help," he said. "She was very weak and cold."

The Rozners have a 7-month-old child.

"These people were leaving," Lazar said. "They might not have found the baby and then we'd have a different story."

Police would like the mother to come forward and are concerned about her health as well as the baby's, he said.

Michigan's Safe Delivery of Newborns law, approved in 2001, eliminates criminal penalties for parents who surrender their infants at a police station, fire station or a hospital.

The babies are surrendered in confidence, Lazar said. Parents are encouraged, but not required, to identify themselves and share their medical histories, Lazar said.

The parent is notified that the infant will be put up for adoption and has 28 days to petition a court to restore custody, he said.

Sandy Crawford, who lives across the street from the home where the infant was found, said she is shocked by the discovery on her quiet suburban street.

"I'm a mother of two," Crawford said. "It's pretty disturbing to think that someone would actually do that and leave. On the flip side of the coin, at least they did that instead of leaving them in a Dumpster, or something."

"I'm just glad the baby is OK."

You can reach Paul Egan at (313) 222-2069 or pegan@detnews.com.

Newborn Abandoned

Umbilical Cord Still Attached

POSTED: 6:41 pm EDT April 8, 2006

CLICKONDetroit.com

A newborn baby was found abandoned Saturday.

At 8:20 a.m., Brownstown Township police responded to a home on Ingram Street, after receiving a tip that a baby was left on the porch of the home.

Upon arrival, officers found a white female baby with blonde hair and blue eyes with the umbilical cord still attached. The baby was found outdoors by the homeowner wrapped in a blanket and towel.

Officials believe the child was born sometime between midnight and 8 a.m. The baby is recovering at Children's Hospital and is listed in guarded condition.

Police are investigating. If you have any information, call the Brownstown Police Department at (734) 675-1300.

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Bill would boost fight against Net predators

Conyers proposes hiring more agents, prosecutors

By Christine Rook

April 10, 2006

Lansing State Journal

The Web is littered with sex criminals who target kids.

What better way to clear out those cyberparasites than with FBI spiders?

A lawmaker from Michigan is drawing up a bill proposal to hire more Web-based hunters - FBI agents and federal prosecutors who can ensnare and delete the Internet perverts before they get to your kids.

By the end of June, U.S. Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Detroit, is expected to call for the addition of at least 250 new FBI cyberhunters and at least 93 new prosecutors.

"We'll take whatever we can get," Special Agent Dawn Clenney said from the FBI's field office in Detroit.

It's difficult for regular citizens, let alone kids, to spot online predators. In Michigan, some cybersex criminals have turned out to be respected police officers and pastors. And the infestation runs nationwide.

This past week, computer crimes detectives nabbed the deputy press secretary for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. They arrested him Tuesday, accusing him of using the Internet to seduce someone he thought was a teenage girl.

Waverly high schooler Ryan Banner of Lansing says he runs across cyber-deviants at least once a week, and there's no mistaking what they want from the 17-year-old.

In one encounter within the last couple of months, a stranger "asked me where I lived and if I wanted to have sex," Ryan said.

The teen didn't respond. Instead, he pressed a key that blocked the person from sending more messages.

"Bam, block button," Ryan said, pushing his index finger through the air to emphasize how quickly he pressed the key.

Conyers' proposal was prompted by recent media accounts of online sex crimes and by pleas from local and state police who lack the federal jurisdiction to swoop in on the sex criminals that often cross state lines to have sex with Michigan children.

The Lansing State Journal in its recent series "On Guard Online" detailed the story of one such criminal - Sihyun Kyung, who at 36 is residing in a state prison outside of Ionia, because he flew from Louisiana to Michigan to have sex with someone he thought was a 14-year-old girl.

There was no girl, just a detective lying in wait.

Michigan State Police computer crimes officials say they encounter about 24 online sex criminals a month.

Nationwide, one in five kids ages 10-17 has received an unwanted sexual solicitation online, and the evidence suggests the problem is getting worse.

In 1998, the federal CyberTip-Line received 707 reports of online solicitations aimed at children. In 2005, the number hit 2,660 reports.

The tip line is run by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, FBI, Department of Justice, and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"After-the-fact criminal penalties do very little to protect our nation's children from dangerous sexual predators," said Conyers, who is the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on the Judiciary.

He sees hiring more federal agents and prosecutors as proactive.

No Lansing-area representatives sit on the Judiciary Committee, which is in charge of criminal law enforcement. But a spokesman for U.S. Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, acknowledged virtually everyone is concerned about online sex crimes.

Contact Christine Rook at 377-1261 or clrook@lsj.com.

Man, 28, receives probation in child-abuse case

Saturday, April 08, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A man accused of beating a little girl after she broke a toy will not serve additional jail time.

Circuit Judge Charles Nelson this week sentenced William Trainer, 28, to three years' probation and credited him with 98 days in jail.

The decision upset the girl's mother.

"I was very, very livid. I was sick to my stomach. I'm very upset with the sentence he got," said the woman, who is not being named. "He hurt my little girl beyond the point he does not even know."

Trainer was arrested in early January for assaulting the girl at the mother's home in a mobile home park off Brooklyn Road.

Trainer had faced up to 10 years in prison for one count of assault with intent to do great bodily harm and four years in prison for a single count of second-degree child abuse.

Prosecutors dropped the assault charge and Trainer pleaded no contest to the child-abuse charge March 8 in Nelson's court. A no-contest plea does not admit guilt but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

"We took the position in the prosecutor's office that that was a serious assault on that child," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said. "It's up to the judge to fix what he thinks is an appropriate sentence after that. We did all we could."

Blumer said Nelson sentenced within the probation guidelines. Nelson declined to comment through his secretary, who said he does not discuss sentencings.

Police photos of the girl, now 5 years old, show purple bruises on her face, two black eyes and redness on her buttocks.

Police and prosecutors said Trainer struck the child on both sides of the face, threw her against a wall and repeatedly hit her on the buttocks after she broke a Christmas present.

Trainer had been living with the girl and her mother for about eight months at the time of the incident. The mother said she is currently 5 1/2 months pregnant with Trainer's child.

She said she is concerned about Trainer's whereabouts, although she suspects he is living in Kalamazoo County.

"Now I have to watch over my shoulder and make sure I'm OK," she said. "Pitiful. I feel like I have to hide now."

Trainer's defense attorney, Susan Dehncke, declined to comment.

F.B.I. and Justice Dept. Are Faulted Over Child Predators on Web

By JOSHUA BROCKMAN

Published: April 7, 2006

The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 6 — Lawmakers from both parties continued on Thursday to question the commitment of the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to halting the online exploitation of children. They also accused the agencies of failing to provide major witnesses for a Congressional investigation into the matter.

House members voiced their protest before and after testimony on the second day of hearings of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, part of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. The tenor of the hearings, which focused on law enforcement efforts to capture online predators and rescue child victims, signaled that a showdown might be imminent.

"We keep trying to cooperate with the Justice Department and the F.B.I.," said Representative Joe L. Barton, Republican of Texas, the chairman of the full committee.

Speaking directly to William W. Mercer, a United States attorney for Montana who testified at the hearings, Mr. Barton said: "You folks seem bound and determined to be as uncooperative as possible. I'm going to call the attorney general one more time, and we had better get the people we want to testify."

Mr. Mercer testified that the caseload of the child exploitation section had increased 445 percent in the last four years, adding that federal prosecutions of child pornography and abuse cases increased to more than 1,500 cases last year from 344 in 1995.

"The attorney general himself," he said, "has made very clear his and the department's commitment to protecting children from sexual exploitation over the Internet." The urgency of the hearings, where witnesses from agencies including the Phoenix police, the Postal Inspection Service and the Department of Homeland Security testified, was underscored by the arrest on Tuesday of a Homeland Security spokesman, Brian J. Doyle, on charges of using the Internet to try to seduce a Florida detective posing as a teenager.

Officials on hand to testify, including James Plitt, chief of the Cyber Crimes Center for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement division, said arrests of federal employees had come as no surprise to them.

The hearing followed testimony on Tuesday by Justin Berry, a teenager who was molested by online predators. Kurt Eichenwald, a reporter for The New York Times, chronicled Mr. Berry's experience in an article in December that spurred the Congressional investigation.

Citing Mr. Berry's testimony that he had no faith in the Justice Department's efforts to act on information he had provided to them, Representative Edward Whitfield, a Kentucky Republican who is chairman of the subcommittee, asked, "Why has it taken so long for the department to act and rescue children in imminent danger of being molested?"

Mr. Whitfield also asked why certain witnesses, including Andrew Oosterbaan, chief of the department's Child Exploitation and Obscenity section, and Raul Roldan, chief of the F.B.I.'s Cyber Crimes section, who appeared on television news programs Thursday morning, did "not have time for us."

Opinion

Month of the young child: More than a slogan

Since April is recognized as the "Month of the Young Child," it is an opportune time to update the community on the latest developments to help our youngest children start out healthy and ready to learn. Here in Ingham County we have created strong community partnerships among our human service agencies and educational organizations to help all children and families be successful. In recognition of these progressive community efforts, we have been rewarded with an Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) grant.

This grant initiative builds upon the Great Start program, launched in 2004 by Governor Granholm and the Legislature. It drives home the important point that learning begins long before a child enters school for the first time; learning begins at birth. By age 2, a child's ability to control his or her emotions and make social attachments is developed. The major part of a child's ability to understand language and vocabulary is in place by age 3. And by age 5, an astounding 85 percent of the brain's ability to learn is completed.

What all this means



Guest column

By Stanley S. Kogut, Jr.

is we must continue to make it a priority to give all children positive educational experiences prior to kindergarten so they can reach their full potential. We know children who participate in high quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, and they

have lower dropout and higher graduation rates. The ECIC initiative will be the vehicle to help our community ensure all children and families who need assistance receive it.

Through the work on the community collaborative, the "Power of We," we realize Ingham County is a microcosm of

the state and the nation. We have approximately 18,000 students, birth through age 4, living in poverty. This constitutes almost one in five children in this age group. When we look at citizens, 25 years or older, a full 12 percent have less than a high school diploma, and almost 50 percent of single parent families live in poverty.

The ECIC collaboration will identify parent liaisons to support coordination efforts and seek additional agencies and organizations to join these efforts, focusing on business and faith-based

organization. Our ECIC consortium will assess needs to give a true picture of the fabric of our community.

As a regional educational service agency, Ingham ISD is proud to partner with other human service and educational organizations, ensuring all children and families not only succeed but thrive.

Stanley S. Kogut, Jr. is the superintendent of Ingham Intermediate School District. He can be reached at 244-1214 or emailed at skogut@inghamisd.org.

When government tries to be a parent

Friday, April 7, 2006 10:33 PM EDT

The Adrian Telegram Editorial

Commentary by Erik Gable

There was much consternation and gnashing of teeth in Lansing this week when a judge struck down Michigan's law banning the sale of violent video games to minors.

"We know violent video games are detrimental to our children, and we need to shield our kids," said state Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt.

An aide to Gov. Jennifer Granholm declared that protecting children is one of the governor's top priorities, "and she will do everything she can to make sure our children are protected from the violence."

And so on, and so forth.

These melodramatic appeals are symptomatic of a growing problem with our government, both in Michigan and nationally: legislators who, for some reason, have decided it's their job to play Mommy and Daddy to every child in the land.

Are violent video games - ones in which the player dismembers opponents or blasts away at police officers with high-powered weaponry - good for children? Probably not. But the solution is not for legislators to punish anyone who lets a minor play a game that the state has decided is unsuitable. Decisions about what games children and teenagers can play should be left in the hands of their parents.

A far more reasonable response is the one made by various legislators and law enforcement agencies to "□ to Life," a game that involves the protagonist killing police officers. These groups are calling on parents and other consumers not to buy or rent the game - fighting it with market pressure, not with legislation.

To be fair, it's not all legislators' fault. They're under intense pressure from lobbying groups, as well as from constituents who demand evidence that their elected representatives are getting things done - never mind whether those things were actually necessary.

And so we end up with proposal after proposal intended to address issues that the state and federal governments simply have no business getting involved in.

Television? Regulate it. So what if parents can use the V-chip to control what their children watch? That's not enough for some folks, who would much rather control what everyone sees on television than trust parents to raise their own children.

The Internet? Regulate it. Children must be protected from seeing anything inappropriate. It's quaint and outdated, apparently, to suggest that parents should fill that role, rather than the government.

Fast food restaurants? Regulate them. A few years back, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, proposed forcing all chain restaurants to post nutritional information on their menus. If people want that information, presumably they'll vote with their feet and eat at restaurants that provide it.

At least we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that it could be worse.

In the United Kingdom, for example, there's a campaign under way to make food manufacturers add folic acid to their bread. The people of Great Britain, supporters apparently believe, are incapable of watching out for their own health and must have their vitamins spoon-fed to them by the nanny state.

I'd like to think state and federal governments in the United States would never start micromanaging people's lives to that extent. But, frankly, I'm not optimistic.

Erik Gable is news editor of The Daily Telegram. He can be reached at 265-5111, ext. 265, or by e-mail at erik@lenconnect.com.

Saturday, April 08, 2006

911 call was treated like a prank, family says

Operator told 5-year-old Detroit boy to stop playing with the phone; his mother died before help arrived

David Runk / Associated Press

DETROIT-- A 5-year-old boy called 911 to report that his mother had collapsed in their apartment, but an operator told him he shouldn't be playing on the phone, and she died before help arrived.

The family of Sherrill Turner, 46, of Detroit, doesn't know whether a swifter response could have saved her life, but they want to know why the operator apparently treated the call as if it was a prank.

"Clearly there is nothing in that that sounded like a prank," Delaina Patterson, the eldest of Turner's 10 children, said Friday.

Detroit police said the 911 response was under investigation.

After Turner collapsed Feb. 20 on the kitchen floor, her son, Robert, placed two calls to 911, Patterson said. In the first call, Patterson said Robert told an operator that his mother had passed out, but the operator asked to speak with an adult.

When he called back later, Patterson said, an operator said: "You shouldn't be playing on the phone."

In a tape of the call, parts of which were broadcast by Detroit-area television stations WJBK and WDIV, the operator said: "Now put her on the phone before I send the police out there to knock on the door and you gonna be in trouble."

In an audio of the tape played on TV, some of what the boy says is unintelligible.

Patterson, who lives in suburban Detroit, said her brother placed the first call about 6 p.m., and police didn't arrive until about three hours later. She said only Robert and his mother were home at the time.

Detroit police spokesman James Tate said it was at least an hour before authorities arrived, but he said he didn't have details. By that time, the boy's mother had died, he said.

"The operator may have believed he was playing on the phone," Tate said.

The 911 operator remains on the job amid the investigation, Tate said.

Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings said it is important not to rush to judgment.

"The citizens of Detroit can be assured that our department is meticulously examining every aspect of what occurred," Bully-Cummings said Friday in a news release, "and if disciplinary action is recommended following the completion of the investigation, then that is the course that will be taken."

She declined further comment "due to imminent or pending litigation."

Kimberly Harris, president of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1023, said the 911 operator deserves the benefit of the doubt as the response is investigated.

"Part of the tapes and the boy's responses were inaudible," said Harris, whose union represents 911 operators.

Robert, who turned 6 last month, is living with relatives in the Detroit area, Patterson said. She said he wasn't available for an interview Friday, but he had recounted the call to local broadcasters.

"I tried to tell them she wouldn't talk," Robert told WDIV.

Detroit

Boy's failed 911 pleas bring calls for change

Detroit cops investigate in mom's death; family upset

April 8, 2006

Detroit Free Press

by BEN SCHMITT

The Detroit Police Department promised a thorough investigation Friday after coming under intense scrutiny both locally and across the nation for an incident in which a woman died after her 5-year-old son's calls to 911 were dismissed as a prank.

Robert Turner, now 6, called 911 twice after his mother collapsed Feb. 20 in her bedroom on Detroit's west side. A recording of the calls, which family members gave the Free Press on Friday, revealed that the boy's pleas for help weren't taken seriously.

Sherrill Turner, 46, died of complications from an enlarged heart, family members said. Police were investigating whether the same operator handled both calls.

The story, first reported Tuesday on Fox 2 News in Detroit, reverberated across the country Friday, with Web sites asking readers whether any operator involved in taking the calls should be fired. No operator's name has been released. Police also said they were fielding calls from people across the nation.

Meanwhile, relatives of Sherrill Turner, who had 10 children, called for the immediate firing of the operator or operators involved and demanded better training for dispatchers.

"From now on, when a child calls 911, they need to follow up, no questions asked," said one of Robert's older sisters, Anitra Turner.

In a statement Friday, Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings urged the public not to rush to judgment, saying city residents "can be assured that our department is meticulously examining every aspect of what occurred." A spokeswoman for Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick had no comment other than to say the police were investigating.

One operator, an 18-year veteran who took at least one of the calls, will remain on the job during the investigation, Detroit Police spokesman James Tate said.

Robert, who turned 6 in March, told the Free Press his mother taught him to call 911 during emergencies. According to the recording, when the boy -- who was alone with his mother -- first called 911 about 6 p.m., an operator asked him to bring an adult to the phone. Robert told the operator he couldn't.

At one point, "she hanged up on me," Robert said Friday. The recording indicates the dispatcher hung up after saying she would send police to the home. They did not arrive.

Robert called back about 9 p.m. An operator told him: "You shouldn't be playing on the phone. ... Now put her on the phone before I send the police out there to knock on the door and you going to be in trouble."

Robert said he was scared and hung up the phone.

One of the boy's older sisters, Delaina Patterson, who lives in Novi, said police -- not EMS workers -- arrived at the home after 9 p.m. "From what I understand they were dispatched to a call about a child playing on the phone," she said. Robert's mother was found dead. It was not clear at what point she died or whether she was alive when Robert made the first call.

Although there are no exact guidelines on how to handle emergency calls, Rick Jones of the National Emergency Number Association said operators have to take all calls seriously.

"There's such a wide range; you have children that call," he said. "You have adults under the influence of drugs that call and sound totally erratic."

Union local president Kimberly Harris defended one operator involved.

"Every call, you have somebody's life in your hands," said Harris, a 911 operator who leads the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1023. "If I had an emergency, I would want her to be on the other end of the line. I will swear to that."

Harris said more than 25% of calls that 911 operators receive are pranks and that Robert's voice was inaudible at times.

"Of all the people's lives we save, this one incident has put a black cloud over us," Harris said. "People are calling for her job and for her head."

Detroit City Councilwoman Barbara-Rose Collins said the council has not dealt with many complaints related to the 911 system, but she described this incident as gross negligence, saying, "It's not up to her to decide if it's a prank or not."

Public scrutiny is part of the job when 911 mishaps occur.

At least one Detroit Fire Department dispatcher was disciplined after a Ferndale man died in an auto accident on Christmas Eve. Although the man died almost instantly, the department came under scrutiny because his body -- and the car -- burned for more than 20 minutes before firefighters extinguished the flames.

In Philadelphia in 1994, seven 911 operators were fired or disciplined after being accused of mishandling 20 calls regarding the fatal beating of a 16-year-old boy who lay bleeding on the steps of a Catholic church.

In New York City in 2000, three 911 operators were disciplined after they ignored pleas from women being brutalized by groups of young men during a Puerto Rican Day parade rampage.

Retired Detroit Police Lt. Ricardo Moore, a former community relations officer for Detroit, said the flaws in 911 cut both ways.

"We always tried to educate the youth not to play with 911, because it's serious," he said, adding operators sometimes "see the caller as an enemy, and that's not usually the case."

Detroit's emergency dispatch system has had a troubled history, too.

In the 1970s and '80s, Detroiters were robbed, burglarized, beaten and even killed as their emergency calls were bungled, misrouted or ignored.

One case even became known as the so-called 911 murders. Clifton and Lydia Ledbetter were shot to death in 1974 as Lydia Ledbetter told a 911 operator someone had shot their dog and ransacked their east-side home. The call ended in a burst of gunfire that the operator mistook for hammering. Lydia Ledbetter was shot more than a dozen times in the back and head.

In another incident, the city authorized a \$3.6-million payment in 1989 to settle a civil lawsuit, nine years after Peggy Saffold's relatives called police four times in 2 1/2 hours about an ex-boyfriend who had threatened her and was hiding in a garage. Police cars weren't dispatched; Saffold was killed, and a sister and a niece were wounded.

In 1987, Benjamin Anderson died despite his wife's repeated calls for EMS. The calls became lost in the shuffle, and he died as an EMS unit stood idle just eight blocks away. Mayor Coleman Young admitted the EMS had become "a shambles."

Contact **BEN SCHMITT** at 313-223-4296 or bcschmitt@freepress.com. Staff writers Bill McGraw, Tamara Audi, Marisol Bello and Joe Swickard contributed to this report.

On a mission: Boy Scouts collect food

Josh Grosteffon
Midland Daily News

04/09/2006

Spread out on the gym floor at Midland's Salvation Army on Saturday morning were the canned fruits, vegetables and soups of area scouts' labor as volunteers brought in and sorted thousands of nonperishable items.

"Every little bit that everybody does combines to be a very significant effort. That's a good lesson for the scouts," said Dave Bakke, event chairman.

The annual "Scouting for Food" drive collected 16,700 items for just the Salvation Army's pantry, and last year collected 23,500 items in Gladwin and Midland County.

"Helping people, sorting and how we give food to people that don't have much money," were Derek Groulx's favorite parts of the drive. He is a cub scout from pack 3791 and third-grader at Chestnut Hill Elementary.

"I like sorting and going around with the carts and getting certain items," Matt Tascarella said, also of pack 3791. Items were sorted by category then stored in the basement of the Salvation Army.

Derek and Matt, both nine, picked-up 291 items between the two of them and two other scouts. They were happy with what they provided to the drive.

"That's pretty good for four," Derek said.

The drive accounts for roughly 60 percent of the food stores, said Dawn Heydens, pantry coordinator for the Midland Salvation Army.

"We don't do a lot of purchasing here, this does take care of a lot," she said. Christmas time drives are their second biggest influx of donations.

The drive also supports the Gladwin Mission, North and West Midland Family Centers, The Helping Hands Mission in Beaverton and Sam's Pantry at St. John's Episcopal Church.

Bakke said the numbers were down this year, but still was pleased with the amount gathered.

Scouts delivered about 19,000 bags throughout the district then come back later for pickup.

"It's a chore to drop those bags off and to a lot of those scouts, it's another thing to do," Bakke said.

"On pick up day when (scouts) get to the Salvation Army and see cumulatively how much food they've collectedÉ it does make an impact," he said.

More than 1,000 scouts, between dropping off bags and pick-up day, 450 adult volunteers, Salvation Army volunteers and help from the Dow High National Honors Society and Key Club were involved in this year's effort at the army site alone.

The high number of volunteers made this year's sorting the fastest yet, Bakke said.

Everything wrapped up at 2 p.m., and the sorting crew was so fast, volunteers ran out of food to sort at times.

"The sorting was so far ahead we were waiting for the last couple of units to bring their food in," he said.

<http://www.ourmidlandforums.com/>

Kids Use Spring Break To Collect Food For The Needy

Valerie Lego

Created: 4/8/2006 10:54:58 PM
Updated: 4/8/2006 11:43:02 PM

GRAND RAPIDS - It's spring break, and for many in West Michigan that means heading south where it's warm or staying home to rest and relax.

But for one West Michigan family spring break means something else entirely.

"I think it was my brother who said, well can we collect cans and my mom thought about it, we all thought about it and thought it was a good idea for spring break," said Cody Szczepanski.

So he joined his brother and recruited his mom and that's how it started, a week of collecting cans for those in need. But it wasn't easy.

Mom Toni says they had to battle the elements, "We went through rain, the cold, we did everything we're up to probably six hundred pounds of food. Every day the kids have asked can we go out for more, can we go out of more?"

But Toni says she couldn't be more proud of her four kids, "We try to teach our children that we are very blessed, there are people out there who don't have anything close to what we have and to hear that maybe those lessons are sinking in."

The week wasn't without mishap.

"Yesterday when it was so cold we were going in and out of the van to warm up and he accidentally shut the door on his arm he's still carrying one bag he's bandaged up but we're still doing it," says Toni.

And they'd do it all over again, if for nothing else but the thrill of the weigh in at Second Harvest Gleaners. "674 (pounds) all right!!" And that's all it took to get the Szczepanski family addicted, "we'll be back next year."

John Arnold at Second Harvest Gleaners says the amount the kids collected is enough to feed between 600 and 700 people.

The Szczepanski's hope to make their spring break walk for food an annual event, because as Cody says, "It feels good to give something back."

Web Editor: Valerie Lego, Weekend Anchor / Reporter

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Macomb County

April 10, 2006

CLINTON TOWNSHIP: Billiards tourney to raise money for needy youths

Players from the Detroit Pistons will trade basketballs for billiard balls when they help the Dale Davis Foundation host an All-Star Charity 8-Ball Tournament on Saturday at Slapsticks Billiards and Spirits, 35691 Gratiot, in Clinton Township. The event will feature two simultaneous tournaments -- one for the general public and one for celebrity players.

The winner from each will face each other in a final game of 8-Ball. There is a \$30 entrance fee for participants and a \$10 donation fee for spectators.

The winner of the tournament will receive a \$200 cash prize. The second-place finisher will be awarded \$100 and the third- and fourth-place finishers will receive \$50 each. All second-round finalists will receive two tickets to an upcoming Pistons game.

All tournament participants will receive a gift bag of assorted merchandise from event sponsors Def Jam Records, Sony, Interscope Records, Budweiser and the Detroit Pistons.

Attendees can also participate in a silent auction for Pistons memorabilia. All proceeds from the event will aid the Dale Davis Foundation's efforts to help economically disadvantaged youth.

For more information, call 586-792-7170.

By Andrea K. Farmer, special writer

It takes only an hour

Pontiac children wait hopefully for adult mentors

By JENA PASSUT

Of The Oakland Press

Web-posted Apr 9, 2006

A fledgling mentor program for needy children at Baldwin United Methodist Church in Pontiac has one hurdle to overcome before getting started: a serious lack of volunteers.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Detroit is working with the Baldwin Center to bring mentors ("Bigs") to the 7- to 14-year-olds ("Littles") who attend an after-school program there. So far, of the 54 eligible children, there are 11 girls and 9 boys between the ages of 7 and 14 signed up for a "Big." Only five people have signed up to help. The program, which requires volunteers to spend 5-6 p.m. each Monday with their assigned "Little," will kick off once each child has a match.

"We want people the children will be able to look up to and they aren't finding that in the Baldwin area," program director Raeshawndra Jett says, gesturing to outside the building where she says "prostitutes and drug dealers roam the streets."

"Basically, the idea is for them to go there and spend some time with the youth they are mentoring," says Raquel Thueme, president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Detroit. "The focus is on being a friend and a positive, caring role model for a child."

There are some requirements: Mentors must be 18 or older and commit to an hour each Monday for at least six to 12 months. For enrollment, there is an interview and background check and mentors will be matched with children according to their interests.

"This is a great opportunity for a person who is thinking of volunteering but doesn't exactly know how," Thueme says.

Besides matching mentors with children, BBBS officials give new mentors an orientation and ice breakers to help motivate conversation.

"Food helps," Thueme says with a laugh.

Jazmine, 11, and Kamari, 8, are waiting for big sisters. They and their brother and sister, Jaquan, 5, and Trayce, 4, all go to the Baldwin Center in the afternoon. While there from 4-6 p.m., they are fed dinner, study and participate in a reading-readiness program.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd come," Kamari says she would tell potential volunteers.

Jazmine whispers, "It's going to be fun."

Judy Mileski runs the daycare center at Baldwin and her five adopted children attend the after-school program. Four of the children, ages 12, 11, 10 and 7, are signed up to get mentors.

"I'm hoping, especially for my boys in particular, for good role models that have morals and can direct them in the right way," Mileski says. "They have no father figure because I adopted them as a single parent. I think that's a huge need, especially for preteen boys."

Mileski's sons have told her they are looking forward to playing basketball and chatting about cars and having "someone to talk to who's not their mom," she says with a laugh.

"Kids need people, and there's not a lot of positive role models in their young lives anymore, especially in the city," Mileski says, adding the one hour a week will help the children tremendously.

"Any amount of time at all, you'd be amazed as to how that could impact the life of that child," she says.

Meals on Wheels seeks funds High demand, drop in donations has it struggling to cover costs

Monday, April 10, 2006

BY KHALIL E. HACHEM

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Reeling from a deficit from last year, the Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels began this one with a successful "Spring Fling" fundraiser in March, collecting more than \$27,000.

"It was our best ever," said Ann Harris, executive director of the organization. "But we still have more work to do."

Harris said donations are down 23 percent and contributions from local unions, the United Way and the federal government have been dropping as well.

However, demand increased from 200 meals a day to 210, Harris said, and some recipients don't have the money to pay for some of the meals. The Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels is one of the few meal delivery organizations in the country that does not have a waiting list, she said.

The nonprofit organization operates on a budget of \$450,000 a year, delivering about 200 meals a day, six days a week in eastern Washtenaw County to make sure clients are fed and visited, Harris said. Recipients are elderly or are people under age 60 who have a severe health impairment.

The organization plans to sponsor events and find ways to increase participation in the holiday home tour, Harris said. It also will be asking churches to sponsor a collection day, she said. The organization carried a \$45,000 deficit from last year, she said. Local organizations are competing with relief efforts for national crises such as Hurricane Katrina, she said.

"We need to be more creative and rally the community to help at least to break even this year," Harris said.

In addition to the spring fundraiser, the organization holds several events including a golf outing in June and a holiday home tour in December, where area residents decorate their homes and the organization sells ticket to visit them, said Morell Boone, director of the School of Technology Studies at Eastern Michigan University and president of the Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels board of directors.

"The people we serve are not flush with money," he said.

Boone said the "Spring Fling" is the organization's main fundraiser, where judges, politicians, professionals and executives team up to wait tables. This year, the event attracted about 400 people, almost twice as many as last year, he said.

For more information or to help, call the Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels at 734-487-9669.

Khalil E. Hachem can be reached at khachem@annarbornews.com or 734-482-3225.

MIRS

April 7 & 8, 2006

Custody Bill Signed Into Law

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed a bill Friday that makes it clear that a mother initially gets custody of a child in a parental rights case, but the agreement doesn't hurt a father's right to eventually earn custody in court.

HB 4161, sponsored by Rep. John **PASTOR** (R-Livonia), came in response to a Wayne County judge's misunderstanding of certain law. The judge believed that when a father signed a form acknowledging paternity that he gave up his custodial rights. That was never the intent of the law, Pastor said.

"Custodial rights are a personal issue between parents and should never be arbitrarily decided immediately following the birth of their child," Pastor said.

Granholt declares April sexual assault awareness month

By Katie Daggett

Central Michigan Life News Staff Reporter

April 10, 2006

Warm weather and outdoor activities aside, spring should come as a reminder for students to be safe.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm declared April Sexual Assault Awareness Month in an effort to raise awareness and reduce the occurrence of sexual crimes.

The month was first observed on a national scale in 2001, and it calls for a variety of events to educate and prevent people from sexual assault.

“There can be poetry slams, educational events in the community and Take Back the Night marches,” said Karen Porter, quality assurance director for the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center’s Web site, www.nsvrc.org, Take Back the Night marches emerged in England in the late 1970s. This was in response to violence which women encountered in the streets at night.

They became more coordinated and extended to the United States in 1978.

Stephen Thompson, sexual assault services coordinator, said everyone should be aware of the prevalence of sexual assault in the nation.

“It is important to focus on this issue as it affects each of us,” he said.

According to the Sexual Aggression Peer Advocates’ Web site, www.sapa.cmich.edu, the risk of being raped is four times greater for women age 16 to 24 than any other age group.

“SAPA has helped approximately 280 individuals so far this year,” Thompson said.

The group will host a Take Back the Night march during the week of April 24 to go along with Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Even though the month ends in April, Porter said it is important to remember millions of cases of sexual assault are reported throughout the year.

“If it does happen to someone, be supportive with their choices” Porter said. “Make sure the person knows that you care and you support them. They are not alone and this should not happen to anybody.”

For more information on sexual assault awareness events going on throughout the state, visit the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence Web site at www.mcadsv.org

Seminar helps women heal from wounds left by sexual abuse

Kimberly Hayes Taylor / The Detroit News

April 8, 2006

Years after the physical pain from a rape or sexual assault has passed, many women have trouble releasing the emotional pain. They remain silent, often fearful they will be attacked again.

According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, every 2 1/2 minutes, someone in the United States is assaulted sexually. One-in-six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is time for healing, says the Rev. Shaheerah Stephens, senior pastor of Transforming Love Community in Detroit.

Stephens joins Lori S. Robinson, author of "I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse" (\$15.95, Seal Press), in facilitating a workshop called "Sacred Sexuality" at 10 a.m. today at the church. Both women are sexual assault survivors.

Stephen says the workshop offers an innovative way to explore sexuality, to "provide healing for our minds, hearts and wombs." Participants will learn to establish proper boundaries for their sexual involvement, the benefits of sexuality when performed in a mutually beneficial encounter and how to enjoy sexual energy without actually having sex.

The pain from sexual encounters is not only an issue for sexual assault victims, she says, it's an issue for every woman who has felt abandoned and empty inside during sex. It's for the woman who had sex, but didn't feel in control of what was happening to her body, and for the woman who has been used for someone else's pleasure.

You can reach Kimberly Hayes Taylor at (313) 222-2058 or ktaylor@detnews.com.

Caregiver charged in elder scam disappears

She stole \$30,000 to \$40,000 from couple, police say

April 8, 2006

Detroit Free Press

He has dementia. She is blind. Both are in their 90s.

And Shelby Township police say a caregiver the couple hired to help them instead stole more than \$30,000 from them, using their checkbook and credit card to make mortgage payments, buy Christmas presents and get cash. Then she disappeared.

The scam continued from mid-October until December, according to Shelby Township Police Detective Terry Hogan. The couple hired Meissema Anita Godboldo -- through what Hogan described as "a reputable company" -- to help with routine chores like housekeeping and bill-paying.

"She was very charming," Hogan said of Godboldo, who is charged in an arrest warrant with fraud on a vulnerable adult. "They kind of became close, and they trusted her."

Godboldo eventually convinced the couple to eliminate the middleman -- her employer -- and just pay her directly for her services, Hogan said.

The 39-year-old caregiver also wrote checks from the couple's account to herself, to cash and to her mortgage company, Hogan said. And she used the couple's credit card to make purchases on eBay and at online retail sites like walmart.com.

Godboldo spent between \$30,000 and \$40,000, he said, before the couple's bank called to say there was nothing left in their checking account -- and that someone was trying to access their savings.

Hogan declined to name the couple, who live in the southwestern part of the township. He also withheld the name of the home elder-care company.

Godboldo has a long list of aliases, Hogan said, and had an address on Lancashire, near Grand River and Outer Drive in Detroit. Hogan said she paid on that house with the couple's money, but it was vacant when officers arrived to arrest her.

*Anyone with information about Godboldo's whereabouts may call the Shelby Township Police Department at 586-731-2121. A reward may be available. Or call Crimestoppers toll-free at 800-773-2587. Contact **JOHN MASSON** at 586-469-4904 or masson@freepress.com.*

- ☒ [Email this](#)

State gets waiver that could put fewer children in foster care

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN

Apr 10, 12:25 PM EDT

Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Thousands of Michigan children may be able to remain with their families rather than go into foster care now that the state has received federal permission to use some foster care dollars to better help those families.

Families could receive mental health services, substance abuse help, housing, clothing and intensive home visits from social workers trained to teach them to treat their children appropriately.

The goal is to help families so children are not at risk of abuse or neglect in their own homes, and avoid having the state put them in foster care for their own protection.

"It's all about helping sooner before children are in danger," state Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow told reporters Monday. "In most cases, these parents want to be good parents. They don't always know where to go for services."

The new focus has been made possible by a federal waiver DHS received that will allow the state to spend part of the \$107 million it gets annually in federal funds for foster care on more early intervention. Michigan has about 17,000 children in foster care, although not all are covered by money included in the waiver.

Some of the money will go to pay relatives who are acting as foster parents, Udow said. They currently cannot receive the payments that go to other foster care families.

Udow said the state's goal is not to save money, but to use the money differently so more children can remain safely with their own families and avoid foster care. Some of the funds will be used to help families regain children in foster care or, where that's not possible, to help the children be adopted more quickly.

The state will begin the new approach with demonstration projects in several counties, including Wayne. The other counties will be selected after they submit proposals on how they would use the money. The program is expected to start sometime between September 2006 and March 2007, Udow said.

On the Net:

Department of Human Services: <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

DHS will Expand Prevention and Family Preservation Services to Keep Children Safely at Home *Michigan One of Five States Approved for Federal Funding Waiver*

April 10, 2006

LANSING – Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) officials today announced that Michigan is one of five states approved by the federal government to use Title IV-E foster care funding to pay for prevention and early intervention services to help families stay together safely.

With this approval, federal funding can be used to help more Michigan children remain safely in their own homes and reduce the number of children who grow up in foster care.

"Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and stable home and the State of Michigan is committed to an aggressive, proactive plan to protect our children," said Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. "We will act swiftly on this new opportunity, and continue moving forward on our plan to keep children safe and support Michigan families."

Funding can also be used for services to help children already in care return home in a safe and timely manner or – when this is not possible – move more quickly into a permanent family.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services approved Michigan's request under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Title IV-E funding is usually earmarked for traditional foster care expenses such as board, care, and administration.

"This approval is a tremendous boost to our overall plan for protecting children and preserving families," said DHS director Marianne Udow. "Our reforms to date have already resulted in fewer children in the foster care system, fewer children re-entering the system, and more children placed with relatives. With this approval, we can expand our prevention efforts and provide families with the kind services they need to keep their children safely at home."

Under the waiver, the state will conduct pilots in five communities, including two in Wayne County. The Wayne County pilot will include six Detroit neighborhoods that are part of the Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods Initiative. The department will solicit bids from other counties interested in becoming pilot sites; the additional sites will be chosen and implementations will begin between October 1, 2006 and March 30, 2007.

- more -

In pilot counties, the state will use IV-E funds to expand family preservation programs (like Families First of Michigan), strengthen family reunification programs, and increase involvement of both birth parents and foster parents in decisions made on behalf of the child. The state can also use the funds to stabilize adoptions and support relative caregivers.

The Detroit-based Skillman Foundation provided a grant to DHS that helped the department secure the federal waiver. The Skillman Foundation is a resource for improving the lives of children in metropolitan Detroit. The Foundation applies its resources to foster positive relationships between children and adults, support high-quality learning opportunities and strengthen healthy, safe and supportive homes and communities. The foundation was founded in December, 1960, by Rose P. Skillman, widow of Robert H. Skillman, vice president and director of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, and has an annual grant making budget of \$23 million.

"Michigan is committed to strong action on behalf of children," Udow said. "Our family- and community-centered approach to child welfare, our Family Resource Centers in at-risk schools, our plan for reducing minority disproportionality, and the Governor's development of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation are all receiving national attention. By approving our request to redirect foster care funding into prevention and early intervention services, the federal government is helping us continue our aggressive steps to protect children and preserve families in Michigan."

For more information about the Michigan Department of Human Services, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

Massachusetts law sparks discussion about locally uninsured

Sunday, April 9, 2006

By Chris Meehan

kalamazoogazette.com388-8412

Kalamazoo area health-care providers applaud last week's move by Massachusetts lawmakers to mandate health-care coverage for everyone in their state.

While they aren't sure this is the best solution for Michigan, local health officials say at least Massachusetts has put a spotlight on the problem. Recent Census Bureau data say nearly 46 million Americans have no health insurance.

About 1 million Michigan residents and nearly 15 percent of all Kalamazoo County adults have no health insurance, state health officials say.

The annual "Cover the Uninsured Week" is coming up in early May, and local health officials say that the problem, which continues to grow in this area, needs all the attention it can get.

"Over the last few years we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people who are self-pay," meaning they have no insurance to cover their health care, said Bob Dewar, revenue-cycle director for Borgess Medical Center.

In 2005 alone, Borgess provided \$10 million in charity care to area patients -- a 66 percent increase from \$7 million in 2004.

Bronson Methodist Hospital officials say it is difficult to track the exact number of local people without insurance who use their hospital. But it is still clear it is a problem, said Bob Doud, vice president of public affairs for Bronson.

"The issue of people without health insurance is no longer an issue for just poor people. We are seeing many families who have incomes of \$50,000 who don't have health care," Doud said.

Bronson provided nearly \$7 million in charity care in 2004, the last year for which it has numbers. Also in 2004, Bronson had to cover nearly \$20 million in non-reimbursed costs for Medicaid patients.

"We need a national policy to address this problem," Doud said.

Meanwhile, however, a coalition of area health-care providers has banded together to bring attention to the issue.

"We are trying to reach the working poor who have no health insurance," said Julie Bradford, medication assistance coordinator for the First Presbyterian Health Clinic, a facility at 2918 Portage Road that provides free care to those in need.

Kalamazoo residents who have no prescription coverage are asked to visit the clinic on May 1 to 4 to find out if they qualify for help.

From May 1 to 3, Borgess will offer assistance to people who have yet to sign up for the new Medicare Part D drug plan.

Local providers are trying to get the word out that there are free and low-cost services available in various places across the community for persons without insurance.

"We are working to insure and educate the public," said Dr. Rochelle Rogers, medical director of the Family Health Center.

Massachusetts health plan worth watching

Intriguing concept

After years of national debate about how to provide health care for everyone, Massachusetts lawmakers have come up with an intriguing plan that essentially makes health insurance mandatory.

Under the bill, which has been approved by legislators and now awaits Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's signature, Massachusetts' 500,000 uninsured residents would have to get health insurance by July 1, 2007, or pay a penalty. About 100,000 of those uninsured are poor people who qualify for Medicaid but have not yet signed up. The \$225 million it will cost to put them on Medicaid will be split between the state and federal governments.

About 200,000 of the state's uninsured residents are low-income families and individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford their own health insurance. Their premiums would be based on income, with those living at or below the federal poverty level paying nothing and those earning between 100 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty level paying part of their premiums based on a sliding scale.

The remaining 200,000 uninsured are higher-income folks. To encourage them to get health insurance, the Massachusetts plan, beginning in 2008, would levy a tax penalty equal to half the cost of health insurance for those individuals who can afford insurance but choose not to buy it. Businesses with 11 or more employees would be required to provide health insurance or pay an annual penalty of about \$295 per employee.

The plan combines the desire to provide medical coverage for everyone with the need for individual responsibility when it comes to health care. But it also carries a price tag of roughly \$720 million a year.

Some of that money will come from funds that Massachusetts has set aside to pay hospitals and other providers for care which they provide for the poor and uninsured.

Critics say people should not be forced to buy health insurance. But here in Michigan we require all motorists to carry auto insurance. What's the difference?

In reality, no one in desperate need goes without health care in the United States. But people with resources tend to get preventative health care, as well as go to the doctor early on when they have a medical issue. People who cannot afford a doctor's appointment tend to put off getting medical care until their condition becomes serious enough to require hospitalization. Not only is such care far more expensive, but it inevitably is paid for by taxpayers, care providers or charitable organizations.

While some business owners in Massachusetts have objected to the new plan, others support it, saying it will level the playing field between businesses that provide insurance and those that don't.

Implementing the plan will be expensive and inevitably will hit some snags, but we think it is an innovative idea that deserves close monitoring and could become the standard for other states.

Originally published April 9, 2006

*Published April 10, 2006
[From the Lansing State Journal]*

Bipartisan: Mass. bridges partisan divide on health; where's Michigan?

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The fact Michigan has a Democratic governor and Republican Legislature sometimes gets blamed for policy impasses at the Capitol.

Yet, look what just happened in Massachusetts. There, a Republican governor and Democratic Legislature agreed on a daring and fundamental change in health care policy: universal coverage. Michigan leaders and residents might not like the Massachusetts details. But they should ask themselves, Why can't politically divided Michigan enact reform like politically divided Massachusetts has?

In her State of the State address, Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed an overhaul to bring health insurance to about 500,000 folks - or about half the state's uninsured population. In outlining the plan to a Senate panel, Community Health Director Janet Olszewski emphasized that it would not raise taxes or increase state spending.

That was 10 weeks ago, though.

Compare that to Massachusetts. Gov. Mitt Romney is expected to sign this week a system that would cover about 500,000 people within three years. That would leave only about 1 percent of the entire population uninsured, reports The New York Times.

The Massachusetts plan relies on everything from an expanded Medicaid program to cover children, to tax penalties for people who fail to buy insurance by a certain date, to fines for businesses that didn't offer insurance plans to workers.

"This is a signal that this issue is no longer a 'liberal' or 'conservative' issue, but an issue that politicians need to care about," said Peter Pratt, senior vice president for health policy at Public Sector Consultants in Lansing.

Massachusetts spending \$125 million in new state funds over three years and the business fees would surely draw a jaundiced eye in Michigan's economy. But the state doesn't have to do it the same way.

The state, though, has to address the 1 million uninsured here somehow.

And don't try to blame partisan feelings for lack of progress, lawmakers.

Detroit

Wayne Co. again eyes an independent mental health panel

April 10, 2006

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW

Detroit Free Press

The creation of an independent authority to run mental health services in Wayne County is again under consideration by the County Commission.

Commission Chair Jewel Ware, D-Detroit, announced Thursday a task force to examine the feasibility of taking control of the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency from county government and putting an independent authority in charge.

The agency, which provides services to 40,000 patients with an annual budget of \$530 million, has come under heavy criticism for spending too much on administration and not enough on patient care. Agency leaders are starting to implement changes to cut administrative costs, but critics say those moves come too late.

Ware created a similar task force in 2003, but it was unable to reach a consensus.

"We owe it to the 40,000 patients served by the agency to make sure they are not denied access or critical services because of what may be a dysfunctional delivery system," she said in a news release.

County Executive Robert Ficano opposes an authority, saying his administration is cleaning up the agency. He could veto commission approval of such an authority, but the commission could override him with a two-thirds majority vote.

Contact **ZACHARY GORCHOW** at 313-223-4536 or zgorchow@freepress.com.

Health care is right around The Corner

Saturday, April 08, 2006

BY JO COLLINS MATHIS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

When Angela King learned she was pregnant, there was suddenly a lot to think about. One big concern was a no-brainer.

King, a 19-year-old Washtenaw Community College student and Ypsilanti resident, had heard friends rave about the prenatal and postpartum care they had received at the Corner Health Center. Now she's a fan, as well.

"The staff is very helpful, and it's a very friendly environment," said King, who says she's learned a lot about good nutrition during the past 22 weeks of pregnancy, and has been helped by a social worker through some tough issues.

For 25 years, the Ypsilanti facility has offered one-stop shopping for medical care, health education and support services to those aged 12 to 21, and their children. At 47 N. Huron St. in downtown Ypsilanti, the Corner Health Center is the largest adolescent health center in the state. Last year, 1,618 patients, mostly female, made 5,855 clinic visits.

The center offers wellness care, including screenings and immunizations; physical exams; medical care for illness; prenatal and postpartum care; pediatric care; family planning counseling and birth control services; STD testing and treatment; HIV-AIDS testing; nutrition education and counseling; and psychosocial, mental health and crisis counseling.

The Teen Theatre Troupe-Peer Education Program is the outreach arm of the center and provides education programs on prevention at local schools.

Matu al-Amin discovered the Corner when she was a sophomore at Ypsilanti High School. Al-Amin joined the center's theater troupe-peer education program to help other teens learn about the consequences of substance abuse and unprotected sex.

"When I first started going here for the theater troupe, it was a place for me to go after school to basically keep me out of trouble," said al-Amin, a 19-year-old student at Eastern Michigan University.

"I have friends I went to Theatre Troupe with who are my best friends still today because of the community we made. But also, the nature and the atmosphere here is so much more personal than a doctor's office. When I come here, they know me by name. It's not just like, 'Can I help you?' It's, 'Hi, Matu. How are you?' My friends say they never feel judged for coming here, no matter why they're here."

Executive Director Joan Chesler is especially elated these days because a psychiatrist will soon join the staff.

"A very large percentage of our patients are depressed or anxious, or both, or more seriously mentally ill," Chesler said. "We never really had the capacity to really take care of them because we only had one social worker and she was taking care of the pregnant patients. So now we have a full-time social worker, and we're going to get a psychiatrist and a psychiatry fellow for one clinic session a week." Adolescents could always receive prescriptions for antidepressants. "But there was no real way to treat them," Chesler said.

"And we didn't have a really good way to follow them," she said. "After three weeks, the kids might say, 'Ah, this isn't working. I don't feel any better.' Nobody was there to say, 'You have to come back. You have to give it six weeks. And then if it still isn't working, we can change it.' Now we're working on a much more closely managed model of care."

Rebecca Hite-Horn, a social worker at the center, said patients often come with a different concern and are found to have depression.

"There's a lot happening in their lives today that is overwhelming," Hite-Horn said. "We provide the kind of environment where they feel safe enough to talk about the things that are troubling them, and they know we're here for them."

Operating on a \$1.5 million budget, The Corner is supported by government grants, foundations, United Way, insurance payments and donations. The staff helps uninsured Washtenaw County residents enroll in the Washtenaw Health Plan, while pregnant patients are encouraged to apply for Medicaid.

Contrary to what some believe, The Corner does not offer abortion counseling.

"In general, when they come here, they already know they're pregnant," Hite-Horn said. "They've already worked through their decision, and they're ready to start their care."

Preventing teenage pregnancy is still one of the center's goals.

"For our young women and men who come in who are not sexually active, we discuss abstinence as the best method, but many of our patients have already made the decision whether or not they want to be sexually active," said Pamela Davis, a doctor of internal medicine and pediatrics who also works at a U-M clinic in Canton. "Our next step is preventing pregnancy as much as possible."

From 1981 to 1987, the Corner made abortion referrals.

"And that became our reputation," Chesler said. "Try as we did, it remained our reputation for many years. And the right wing took off after us in the late '80s and early '90s to the point where I had to have a lawyer write a cease-and-desist letter."

Opponents were very upset when The Corner Health Center was located within the administrative side of the old Ypsilanti High School, charging that the schools were violating the trust the opponents had with the schools.

"As soon as we moved downtown into our own building in 1987, they backed off because then we were in the free market place, and the clinic no longer had a relationship with the schools that contradicted their trust," Chesler said. "So it was really much better for us to have moved downtown."

Also in 1987, The Corner began receiving money from the state's Department of Community Health that included a rule forbidding abortion referrals.

On any given day, several pregnant teens and new mothers can be found at The Corner.

As she held her 2-week-old daughter at The Corner this week, Wendy Watson, 21, praised the staff for the care she has received there.

"They asked me when I was almost due if I wanted her to come here, and I was like, 'Most definitely! You guys are awesome!'"

Jo Mathis can be reached at jmathis@annarbornnews.com or 734-994-6849

From homeless child to scholar

U-M freshman studies at library where her family once took shelter

Sunday, April 09, 2006

BY DAVE GERSHMAN News Staff Reporter

Jenny Zhang used to look out the windows of the library at the University of Michigan and think how differently her life was turning out from the lives of the students she saw on the Diag.

She was homeless with her mother and father, taking refuge, for a time, in the university library. They had lost their house after her parents couldn't meet the rental payments. They had nowhere to go. When the library closed late at night, the family walked the city streets until it reopened early in the morning.

She was 13 and missing out on the seventh grade.

Today, Zhang is one of those U-M students. As a 19-year-old freshman, she's making a new life for herself.

Her old life is just a memory; there's little that connects her to those days.

"For the longest time, I wouldn't tell anybody," said Zhang. "But it's nothing to be ashamed of."

Her story is one of perseverance. Sitting in a local coffee shop recently, she talked in a matter-of-fact manner about how she once didn't see a way out of homelessness for her family. Then social workers caught up to her parents. She was removed from their care, and sent to live in foster homes away from where she grew up in Ypsilanti.

She hasn't seen her parents in five years. And nobody - not Zhang, not her caseworkers - knows where they are. Zhang said she has no ill will toward her parents. They ran into troubles, but they did the best they could, she said. "They didn't do it because they hated me," she said, adding later: "I don't know if it was a sickness. But I know that they couldn't help it."

Through all of the changes, Zhang kept her focus. She excelled in high school in Hillsdale, earned scholarships and worked part time to help pay for her education.

"A lot of people our age, they don't really have a lot of planning," said Colin Hepker, a friend who also attends U-M. "They're just flying by the seat of their pants. But she has a plan and she wants to stick to it."

Gail Ziegel, Zhang's favorite high school teacher, said Zhang had an uncommon maturity. Ziegel taught art, and Zhang took art classes each of her four years in high school. Ziegel graduated from U-M.

The two, who still keep in touch, happened to talk about the university after class one day.

Zhang, a hard-working and creative student, let on that she had spent a lot of time in the U-M library, but Ziegel didn't learn the whole story until much later.

"Being able to pick up and move forward and not carry your baggage takes a lot of maturity," Ziegel said.

Growing up, Zhang's family life in the first few years wasn't that unusual. Her family immigrated from their home in Beijing to Ypsilanti, where her father came to study for a master's degree in international business at Eastern Michigan University.

Zhang was 3 when she and her mother arrived the following year. Her father came to Michigan because, Zhang said, "he wanted a better life for all of us."

Her parents placed a strong emphasis on education and had high expectations for their daughter. Both loved reading. Her mother also excelled at mathematics. Getting a "B" in school wasn't acceptable. Her mother pored over old school textbooks she found in the Ypsilanti library to learn what American children were being taught. She had her daughter calculating fractions before the first grade. It wasn't until her father became more interested in religion, Zhang said, that her family ran into troubles, and they got worse by degree.

She said her father believed that God wanted him to temporarily stop working and suffer a life of poverty. He'd rather have worked, she said, but he believed he couldn't.

He began giving away the family's possessions. And with no money coming in to pay the bills, her parents eventually had to give up their car. Then they couldn't make the rental payments on their house. Finally, they were evicted and out on the streets.

For about a year, the family was homeless. During the first week, they stayed in a cheap motel. Her father saved up money from selling the family's furniture after their eviction. They stayed another week in a church. Then for several months, they stayed in the basement of a friend.

The shelters were the next stop. Her family bounced from shelter to shelter. In between, they lived in public spaces. To stay longer in a shelter, her father had to look for work, and he refused. As an adolescent, being homeless was hard but it didn't seem all that strange, Zhang said. She accepted it. But she was troubled that there didn't seem to be a way out for her family.

"You just feel like this is the rest of your life," Zhang said.

Inside the U-M library, her parents enjoyed reading Chinese-language books in the tightly packed graduate stacks. Zhang read and reread two English-language books the family toted in a backpack. Hidden among the rows of books, nobody would find them, she said.

The turning point came when social service workers caught up to Zhang and her parents after they went to a shelter in Ann Arbor.

Zhang was placed by Lutheran Social Services of Michigan into foster care in April 2000, according to the agency. Being placed in foster care was tough. She was attached to her parents. And there was the sudden culture change of living with an American family.

She lived in two foster homes before becoming eligible for independent living when she turned 16. She received state money, and used it to stay with a friend's family for two years.

"After all this, the system has really been a help in providing stability," she said.

She plans to live with a friend's family this summer. Given her friends there, she said, she knows there will always be a place for her in the Hillsdale area.

When it came time for her to think about what to do after high school, she applied to U-M and Michigan State University. She wrote about her time being homeless in the U-M library for one of the U-M application essays.

Returning to U-M was bittersweet, Zhang said. With scholarships and financial aid, she makes ends meet and works a job in the cafeteria in South Quad. She also had obtained money offered by the state to children in foster care to pay for some of her expenses.

"She has such insight at such a young age," said Carrie Nichols, Zhang's former caseworker at Lutheran Social Services. "She's a great kid. She impresses me every single day."

She plans to study international business or economics, and is interested in art history. She plans to take Chinese to satisfy her foreign language requirement. She never learned the language as a child. She has hopes that her parents still live in the area, and that she will someday find them. "I do need that closure," she said.

Regardless, Zhang says, her future is promising in a way she couldn't imagine when she was 13. "And I intend to make the most of it," she said.

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Livingston County

Shelter serves troubled teens

The Connection offers place in Howell to stay, counseling for youths and their families.

Jon Zemke / Special to The Detroit News

April 9, 2006

HOWELL -- Runaway or homeless teens in Livingston County have a new place to turn to this year.

The Livingston Family Center opened its first emergency shelter, The Connection, in January. The Howell-based shelter serves as a place for minors, mainly between the ages of 13 and 17, and their families to seek help.

Livingston Family Center Director Janet Loesche will address the Rotary Club of Howell Monday afternoon about The Connection and the center's mission to help teens in need in the county.

"The goal of the program is to get (kids) back home," Loesche said.

The shelter offers outpatient counseling services for teens and their families. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it is always staffed by trained and certified adults and acts as a shelter for runaway or homeless youths who need a place to stay.

Six beds are available in The Connection's rented house. Four are reserved for girls and the other two are for boys. Youths who stay there do so voluntarily with consent of their families.

"Nobody is kept there," Loesche said. "Nobody is court ordered there. It's not a lockup."

Teens are referred there by social service organizations or major institutions that interact with youths, such as schools.

The shelter takes up much of the Livingston Family Center's \$240,000 budget. However, the Livingston Family Center also offers service outside of the shelter. Based out of Hamburg Township for nine years, it has provided more than 200 nights of shelter for youth in the last six months through The Connection shelter and foster homes.

It also offers help through an emergency hot line at (866) 440-7233. The lecture is part of the Rotary's community outreach efforts. The Rotary meets weekly at the hospital and supports a variety of community nonprofit causes.

"We try to keep our members aware of what's going on in the community," said Ron Hingst, a member of the Rotary Club of Howell.

The Rotary's meeting will be held at noon in the St. Joseph Mercy Livingston Hospital, 620 Bryon Road in Howell. Attendees are advised to enter the door on the north side of the hospital.

Bush tax cuts help low-income workers most

Millions are excused from the burden of federal income tax

Detroit News Editorial

April 10, 2006

Critics condemn the tax cuts President George W. Bush pushed through in 2001 as a gift to the wealthy. But little is said about the considerable windfall they delivered to low-income workers.

As the income tax filing deadline approaches, fewer Americans than ever before are paying federal income taxes.

Before the Bush tax cuts, roughly 25 percent of working Americans on the low end of the earnings scale were exempted from paying income taxes.

This year, that percentage grows to 32 percent, according to the national Tax Foundation, largely because of the increased child credits and other breaks lower income earners were given in the Bush tax cut package.

Congress ought to consider that as it continues its foot-dragging on making the tax cuts permanent.

While Democrats decry the tax cut package for trimming the capital gains tax and lowering the top rates, it's hard to envision a tax system that could be more progressive than one that excuses a third of taxpayers from contributing to the federal Treasury.

We find that trend to be troublesome -- the fewer workers affected by the tax code, the smaller the constituency for restraining the tax burden.

But regardless, the Tax Foundation study refutes the unending Democratic braying about Bush's "tax cuts for the rich."

Wealthier Americans certainly benefited from the tax cuts. And they in turn benefited the nation by investing and spending their windfall, stimulating the economy, creating jobs and helping the nation avoid recession despite the shocks of September 11 and the Iraq War.

But the real story of the tax cuts is that they cut millions more Americans off the tax rolls -- more than 43 million tax returns, representing 91 million individuals, will file this year showing zero or negative tax liability.

In Michigan, 1.4 million returns, or about 30 percent, will owe no taxes.

As Americans put the finishing touches on their returns, they might want to ask where the real unfairness of the tax code lies -- in trimming a few percentage points off the burden faced by top earners, or in excusing such a large number of citizens from financially supporting their government.

Prisoner Re-Entry Program

A new program is helping newly released prisoners find work when they return to the community, which in turn could help reduce the number of them returning to a life of crime. 230 prisoners in nine northern Michigan counties are being released this year. Before the initiative, prisoners were left with minimal guidance and services after they returned to their communities. Now, a program backed by Governor Granholm provides prisoners with the tools they need to succeed. Under the prisoner re-entry initiative, other services like transportation, housing and counseling will also be provided for former prisoners.

Agencies, charities brace for the worst

Monday, April 10, 2006
MARY L. LAWRENCE
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A satellite branch of Saginaw County's Department of Human Services could materialize at a United Auto Workers hall if Delphi Corp. proceeds with job layoffs and plant closings.

The idea is not far-fetched, said Randy R. Barst, 49, executive director of the county Department of Human Services, 411 E. Genesee.

On March 31, Delphi asked a federal judge to void its union contracts at 29 plants. Delphi plans to keep eight of those plants open while selling, winding down or relocating the other 21, including its two Saginaw County plants.

Delphi Steering, 3900 E. Holland in Buena Vista Township, employs 4,300 hourly workers; Energy & Chassis, 2328 E. Genesee in Saginaw, has 1,100 hourly employees.

"Losing any number of jobs will have a major impact on our agency and staff," Barst said. "If there are plant closings, we plan to reach out by setting up a satellite office, maybe at a union hall.

"A lot of Delphi workers won't qualify initially, but we wouldn't discourage anyone from applying and learning what assistance is available."

Complicating the process is the fact that state aid is shrinking, not expanding, Barst said.

"This is a difficult period," he said.

Needs are growing, agreed Cherrie Benchley, 55, president and chief executive officer of the United Way of Saginaw County.

"Our agencies are faced with possibly serving more people with fewer staff and resources. The worst (economic) times produce the greatest needs," she said.

Benchley said the county's largest charity plans to diversify its revenue stream by searching for grants and funding from private foundations and businesses, lessening its reliance on autoworkers.

Delphi employees traditionally contribute 30 percent to 40 percent of the money in United Way's annual campaign. During the 2004 campaign, Delphi workers

accounted for more than \$1.1 million of the slightly more than \$3 million collected that year. The charity exceeded its \$2.8 million 2005-06 goal, as volunteers collected slightly more than \$2.9 million.

United Way officials say the Delphi bankruptcy and plant closings could take hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the campaign. Retirements and job cuts could significantly reduce the level of fair share giving.

Charities and human and social services agencies serving county residents are bracing for larger caseloads even though financial resources remain stagnant.

"Every time there is a downturn, there are more people who need our services," said Betty Nagel, 58, executive director of Child and Family Service.

"We plan to offer support to Delphi employees and their family members for all they have done for us in the past. We don't want to leave them in their time of need."

The Salvation Army Red Kettle drive is another annual fundraiser that has relied on the generosity of auto industry workers in the past.

"Until it happens, I'm not sure how it will impact us," said Saginaw Salvation Army Maj. Wayne Ruston, 44. "Certainly, it will have some impact.

"We're already seeing a slight increase in requests for heating assistance; additional needs will make it even more difficult in the future," Ruston said. "We have some limited funds to help those having a hard time paying mortgages to help people keep their houses.

"In the three years that I've been here, Saginaw has been very responsive in their giving. We have met our Christmas goal each year.

"Of course we would get fewer funds with fewer givers, so it's hard to speculate."
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Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may call her at 776-9676.

Stop ... Think

Petition drive would lock state into terrible times

April 10, 2006

It's called Stop Overspending, a campaign slogan that is laughable in a state that can barely maintain its schools, towns and roads as it is.

The petition campaign, now under way statewide, calls for constitutional changes that would basically cap state spending in its present miserable condition. Even if the economy zoomed and Michigan returned to full employment, services would not be allowed to grow at the same pace.

Colorado, which suffered through the first experiment with this type of tax limit, has put it on hold for five years. Voters opted out after facing years of school overcrowding, crumbling roads and so little money for social services and health programs that they couldn't match all the federal dollars available to them.

The Stop Overspending plan limits state budget growth to the inflation rate plus the rate of population growth, which is essentially zero here. Any excess money that comes in, even from non-tax sources such as the tobacco settlement, would be split between the state's rainy day fund and taxpayer refunds.

Michigan, mired in job losses from auto industry restructuring and other manufacturing struggles, would start in a hole.

"If a state's currently in the toilet, this is going to keep it there," said Nicholas Johnson of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit research group that focuses on issues affecting low- and middle-income families.

The Stop Overspending group has dressed up its petition bullet points carefully. (Look on the back of the petition to see the full damage to the Constitution.) The first point, in fact, isn't even about budget rules; it calls for an end to pensions for the state lawmakers, which is merely window dressing.

The need to deflect attention from the main purpose ought to raise a huge red flag about the hidden consequences of this petition drive, which an Illinois group is coordinating in Michigan and several other states this year. The proposed budget cap sets the stage for service cuts even in times of prosperity. It's a formula that would put Michigan down for the count.

Information on the campaign is available at www.sosmichigan.com. Information from opponents can be found at www.milhs.org.

Michigan under the gun to get welfare clients working

Monday, April 10, 2006

By Sharon Emery

Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Michigan needs an "emergency triage team in every county" if it hopes to more than double the number of welfare recipients who are working by this fall, GOP lawmakers say. They're worried because the federal government is threatening to cut nearly \$38 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) if the state doesn't get 50 percent of work-eligible welfare recipients in jobs or training starting Oct. 1. Michigan's work-participation rate now is about 23 percent.

"This is going to take an attitude sea change in the expectations we have for these citizens of ours," Rep. Bruce Caswell, R-Hillsdale, said at a recent subcommittee meeting on the Department of Human Services budget.

Michigan is one of two states that let people stay on cash assistance indefinitely, as long as they are trying to find work or getting training. Republicans last year tried to put a four-year cutoff on that assistance, which averages about \$459 monthly for a family of three, but Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm vetoed the move.

She also nixed tougher sanctions for people not complying with work requirements, saying a more compassionate approach focusing on making people self-sufficient was needed.

Now the state must get another 27 percent of the 42,800 Michigan families subject to the work rules employed -- fast.

"We need to reach some kind of agreement on where this state is going on welfare," said Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids. "... the rubber needs to meet the road."

Specifics on who's included in the work requirement and what activities count as work are not expected from the federal government until June, adding to the state's anxiety.

Michigan is among 15 states looking to increase work participation more than 100 percent, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures; another 12 states must up their numbers by more than 50 percent.

The situation is at the heart of a nationwide welfare-reform dilemma: how to get people without social, educational and job skills working, and how to keep former welfare clients employed.

About 50 percent of Michigan residents who leave welfare return within a year.

The state is hoping to jump-start its efforts by rolling out pilot projects for the new J.E.T. (Jobs, Education and Training) program in Kent, Sanilac, Wayne and Oakland counties starting this month. The program is designed to get people off cash assistance by assessing their needs immediately, and keep them off by providing broad and continuing supports once they start working, a key difference from the current Work First program.

But lawmakers are sweating the limited scope of the initial plan, suggesting that an immediate statewide rollout might be in order.

"Let's bite the bullet and do it," Kooiman said. "...we can't afford to wait."

DHS Director Marianne Udow acknowledged that expansion of J.E.T. is "fundamental to what we need to do to meet the work participation rates," but said the pilots are necessary to make sure the plan is solid.

State and federal reforms in the 1990s mainly sought to get people off welfare -- into any job, at any pay -- and were widely successful. There were some 240,000 welfare cases in Michigan before those reforms; now there are about 78,000.

But the cases that remain are largely people with significant obstacles to getting and keeping a job. That means they need more services and more direct management of their cases at the county level.

"When you ask people to do more, the state has the responsibility to do more at the same time," said Rep. Chris Kolb, D-Ann Arbor.

By reducing the number of people receiving cash assistance and making sure they don't return to the welfare rolls, the J.E.T. pilot program is expected to create net savings of \$11 million. Plans call for those savings to go toward hiring additional caseworkers.

The work-participation penalties are part of the federal Deficit Reduction Act approved in February. Since many states are unlikely to meet the goals, the hope is that having a good plan will earn states points with the feds.

Udow said the J.E.T. program should make considerable progress in getting people to work in the 2007 budget year starting Oct. 1, and that the feds will likely consider that when contemplating penalties in 2008.

The threatened TANF cuts, which could ultimately result in a net loss of more than \$108 million to the state budget, could hurt programs for low-income working families, including those aimed at preschool-age children and child abuse prevention. TANF funds to those programs are likely to shrink in any case, since the work-participation rules necessitate more spending there.

Sharon Parks, of the Michigan League for Human Services, said the dilemma was created when the state used TANF "to plug holes in the general fund while we were cutting taxes."

"...Now we need those dollars to focus on work and training, but they're in other critical areas."

Abrupt welfare change won't get more to work

Monday, April 10, 2006
Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial

Can Michigan double the number of welfare recipients who are working the federally mandated number of hours by October?

If the state can't do it, it can expect to lose nearly \$38 million in federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families money.

Ultimately, it could cost the state more than \$100 million in public assistance funding.

The Michigan Department of Human Services is getting ready to pilot its new Jobs, Education, Training -- or JET -- program in four counties. Welfare recipients in Kent, Sanilac, Wayne and Oakland counties would have many of the same requirements as under the state's Work First welfare-to-work program.

Currently, 23 percent of those receiving public assistance are meeting the federal work requirement. As part of the federal Deficit Reduction Act, Congress is mandating that states that still have less than 50 percent of its welfare caseload in work programs in October can expect cuts in TANF funding.

Unfortunately for the states, information about what the federal government will count as work and who is required to work won't be out until June. So that makes it even more difficult for states to comply.

About half of adult welfare recipients who find a job are back on public assistance within a year. Many cite problems with transportation and child care. Others aren't adequately educated or trained to keep a job.

Under the JET pilot, participants who go to work will continue to receive a number of services designed to help them stay employed.

Some state lawmakers are suggesting that, instead of taking JET for a test run in four counties, it be rolled out statewide immediately.

We question the wisdom of imposing an untried program statewide without knowing whether it will work or whether parts of it will need to be modified.

On the other hand, if the state's public assistance programs will soon face a crisis because of the shortsightedness of Congress, then perhaps more counties should be included in the pilot and it should be of shorter duration.

Michigan isn't alone. At least 14 other states must at least double the number of welfare-recipients who are meeting the federal work requirements. Another 12 states will have to increase participation by more than 50 percent.

We agree that anyone receiving public assistance who can work should hold a job, go to school, perform community service. But this abrupt mandate from Congress -- the law was passed in February -- can only serve to throw the social service programs in at least half the states into disarray.

It would have been better to insist on incremental improvements phased in over several years.

This won't help move more people from welfare to work. It will move them from welfare to nothing.

Barriers to finding a job

Monday, April 10, 2006

Ann Arbor News

Many of the people the state is trying to make employable have been on welfare for years and have significant barriers to finding and keeping jobs:

- No reliable transportation 50%
- Functionally illiterate 47%
- Little/no job training/experience 41%
- Physical health problems 27%
- Mental health problems 15%
- Alcohol and/or drug problems 6%
- Domestic abuse issues 4%

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services